



STAFF REPORT

HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION MEETING DATE: 09/23/15

DEPARTMENT: PLANNING

ITEM DESCRIPTION: Report by Department of Planning regarding historic and archaeological resources in local media

BACKGROUND

No relevant case history.

SUMMARY

Please enjoy the attached articles.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

NO ACTION REQUIRED

BACKUP DOCUMENTS

- “Golden Gate President Mark Brandenburg: Five gems at Las Vegas’ original casino hotel,” www.lasvegassun.com, 08/23/15
- “In Downtown News: Illuminating Neon Museum, Boxing In Buskers,” www.dtlv.com, 07/29/15
- “Knowing Vegas: Who are some of Southern Nevada’s streets named for?,” www.reviewjournal.com, 09/02/15
- “Midcentury Las Vegas home converted to net-zero home,” www.reviewjournal.com, 08/21/15
- “Researcher doubts Sinatra role in LV integration,” www.reviewjournal.com, 09/01/15
- “The Long, Hot Summer of ‘55,” www.vegasseven.com, 08/06/15

Golden Gate President Mark Brandenburg: Five gems at Las Vegas' original casino hotel



LEILA NAVIDI

Mark Brandenburg, president and co-owner of the Golden Gate Hotel, stands in front of a new mural in the new entrance of the Golden Gate in downtown Las Vegas on Monday, March 19, 2012.

By Mark Brandenburg
Sunday, Aug. 23, 2015 | 7 p.m.

Editor's Note: As Robin Leach spends family time in La Jolla, Calif., after returning from his annual Italian travels, many of our Strip personalities have stepped forward in his absence to pen their words of wisdom.

We continue today with guest columns from Golden Gate President and owner Mark Brandenburg on the hidden gems at the oldest casino hotel in town and Fine Restaurant Group chef Yvonne Maatouk. Here's Mark:

It's difficult to believe that in 2016, we will celebrate Golden Gate's 110th anniversary. That's right: Our doors opened at 1 Fremont St. in



The Golden Gate in downtown Las Vegas.

1906 when there were no neon lights overhead, definitely no Slotzilla and not even a paved street — just a dusty road traveled by horse and buggy. We are the Las Vegas original!

My history with Golden Gate started in the eighth grade, when Italo Ghelfi, the managing partner and my stepfather, introduced me to the basement (something out of “The Addams Family”) and handed me a mop.

While Italo was less interested in teaching me lessons in Las Vegas history than working for a living, I would learn to appreciate both. Today, I proudly serve as the president and owner of this classic hotel casino and would like to share five hidden gems that you might otherwise miss:

Mini museum

When you approach the Golden Gate lobby, you'll find a display case holding artifacts. This includes 1907 gaming ledgers, authentic model of Las Vegas' first telephone (the phone number was 1!) and Prohibition-era whiskey bottles found in walls during our renovation.

These pieces are a testament to Golden Gate's history dating to when the property was Hotel Nevada and Sal Sagev.

Drink like The Rat Pack

We've been pouring drinks for fun-loving partygoers for more than a century, including fabulous flappers during The Roaring '20s, plus Frank Sinatra, Dean Martin and Sammy Davis Jr. during The Rat Pack era.

Tip your glass at Bar Prohibition!, our vintage bar serving specialty drinks in tribute to the dynamic people who made Las Vegas what it is today.

Best 'tail in town

OK, this gem is not so hidden. People from all over America — and world — know where to find the best shrimp cocktail in town. When my stepfather introduced shrimp cocktail in 1959, he started a Las Vegas tradition.

That tradition thrives today served in the same classic tulip sundae glass with our secret cocktail sauce that'll clear your sinuses.

Posh penthouses

Where can you find a patio balcony downtown with fireplace, HDTV and grill? Our two penthouses feature these amenities, along with two master bedrooms and elegant living/entertainment area with three flat-screen TVs and island bar.

Times have changed since 1906. Light up a cigar, throw on some steaks and invite 20 to 30 of your closest friends.

Old-school surveillance with mirrors

Security cameras are everywhere today, but, in the 1950s, my stepfather installed two-way mirrors in the ceilings and walls and crawled inside 100-plus-degree attic space to catch cheaters.

So the next time you play blackjack at Golden Gate, look up at the ceiling. We kept that mirror to remind us that surveillance is a lot cooler than it used to be.

Here's something you never heard Sinatra say: Tweet us at @GoldenGateVegas if you find any of these hidden gems during your next visit!

Be sure to check out our other guest column today from Fine Restaurant Group chef Yvonne Maatouk. Also check out my visit with Shania Twain for her “Rock This Country Tour” stop Saturday night in San Diego.

We'll have our final guest columns as I wrap my family vacation in La Jolla and return for Thursday's premiere of Celine Dion at Caesars Palace and a star-studded Labor Day Weekend.

Robin Leach of “Lifestyles of the Rich & Famous” fame has been a journalist for more than 50 years and has spent the past 15 years giving readers the inside scoop on Las Vegas, the world's premier platinum playground.



The Golden Gate in downtown Las Vegas.



The Golden Gate in downtown Las Vegas.



In Downtown News: Illuminating Neon Museum, Boxing In Buskers

DOWNTOWN NEWS

DAILYFIASCO

Wednesday, July 29 3:21pm

By **Geoff Carter**

In Downtown News is a digest of news stories and blog posts about downtown Las Vegas compiled from local, national and international sources. Seen something? Say something: Editor@DTLV.com.

STAY IN THE LIGHT: We always love to hear from our good friends at the Neon Museum, but we especially enjoy hearing from them on weeks like these, when they

have not one, but two discrete pieces of wonderful news. Firstly: A sign that formerly hung on the Riviera—a relatively new addition to the boneyard; it came to the Museum when the Riviera closed last May—has been powered up, joining the small but growing collection of vintage Vegas signs that the Museum has restored to operation. The Riviera sign will continue glowing even as its namesake resort is demolished later this year.

Sadly, the nearby Desert Rose sign can't make the same claim: It doesn't light up, and its parent property was torn down years before the Neon Museum even existed. But that doesn't dampen our enthusiasm for Wonderful Announcement Number Two: The Neon Museum is currently raising funds to partially restore this beautiful sign, via Kickstarter. Here's the word directly from the campaign page:

We've already raised \$10,000 but it's not enough. We need approximately \$50,000 to resurface and repaint the 1960 Desert Rose Motel cabinet and reattach the elegant rose trellises to the billboard-style sign. Repainting a sign like the Desert Rose Motel protects the sign from the elements and secures its long-term stability.

The Desert Rose is one of the jewels of the Neon Museum's collection, and there isn't much we wouldn't do to see it in something closer to its original condition. Plus, the contributor swag is great. [Donate to the Desert Rose campaign here](#), and help the Neon Museum to continue delivering great news on the regular.

MUSIC, BOXED: The Fremont Street Experience and the City of Las Vegas are moving ahead with plans to limit Fremont's street performers to "performance zones." [James DeHaven of the Review-Journal reports](#) that this new ordinance, scheduled to be introduced next week, would require Fremont's outdoor entertainers—which at present includes a bucket drummer, some elderly gentlemen dressed up as KISS, and a incomprehensibly large-breasted pirate wench, topless but for a set of pasties—to register with the city and to stay within one of several six-foot diameter zones on Fremont, rotating from one space to another on the hour. City and Fremont Street Experience officials probably hope this will reign in some of the skeeviness that still exists under the canopy, despite tightened restrictions on open containers. Our advice to the Fremont Street Experience group: Remove the canopy and reopen Fremont to automobile traffic on weekdays, closing it to cars at night and on weekends. And keep the KISS guys. They were made for lovin' you, baby.

Posted September 2, 2015 - 12:10pm

Knowing Vegas: Who are some of Southern Nevada's streets named for?



(Review-Journal file photo)



By Kristen DeSilva
reviewjournal.com

Navigating Las Vegas' major roads isn't very difficult when you realize most correspond with the major hotel on the same street or by traveling via the Las Vegas Valley's surprisingly simple highway system.

While many locals will grumble at a few streets that don't seem to make sense around Southern Nevada, many were named with purpose.

In some subdivisions, it's obvious that street planners seem to have a little fun with it, between a Beatles-themed neighborhood, a subdivision all named for J.R.R. Tolkien and various other cleverly-named areas of town referencing movies, sports, landmarks and popular culture.

Major roads — intersecting the Strip — are mostly named along with a hotel of the same name. Flamingo Road intersects the Strip at the Flamingo hotel-casino, Tropicana Avenue intersects the Strip at the Tropicana hotel-casino, and so on.

Many others, however, named for specific people, often go unrealized by Las Vegas locals and visitors alike. Most people are aware of streets named for Frank Sinatra and Elvis Presley, but others, named for pioneers, innovators, entertainers and politicians are passed without a second thought.

Here's the background on some of those streets around Southern Nevada, for those of you who don't know:

Fremont Street: John Charles Fremont, born in 1813 in Georgia, was a military man leading surveys into the West who's responsible for multiple namings in Nevada. According to "Nevada: a History of the Silver State" by historian Michael Green, Fremont officially identified Las Vegas on an American map and named Mount Charleston for the town in which he grew up. There's no telling how much Fremont would have enjoyed a zipline or eclectic selection of bars.

Dean Martin Road: Sure, you know Sinatra, but some (especially those under 30) in and out of the city may not know Martin's name. For nearly three decades, Martin was one of [the hottest entertainers in town](#). He was an actor, singer and performer — among other things — who later befriended Sinatra and formed "the Rat Pack." Dean Martin Drive and Frank Sinatra Drive run parallel on either side of the I-15. He's one of a few who has had the lights of the Las Vegas Strip dimmed in his honor after death.

Stephanie Street: In naming the Las Vegas valley, one will find a lot of nepotism around familiar names. Stephanie's family may not be familiar these days, but she lends an example. [According to Mark Hall-Patton](#), Stephanie Page Wurzer was the oldest daughter of a manager at Stauffer Chemicals — Harold J. Wurzer — whose friend named the street. At the time, of course, the always-busy major Henderson street was just a small road.

Carson Avenue: Anyone who grew up in Las Vegas will remember what happens when [you follow the old "Kit" Carson trail](#), but do you remember what he did? As part of Ewing Young's party in 1829, Christopher "Kit" Carson helped publicize the Old Spanish Trail through Southern Nevada, according to Green's book. He later led a group of surveyors that included Fremont. If you follow the new "Kit" Carson trail, you'll find a few eateries and government buildings.

Lamb Boulevard: No, this isn't *that* Lamb. Many are familiar with Floyd Lamb Park and various other valley things that have taken the name of the former Nevada senator. Lamb Boulevard was actually named for another member of family, Press Lamb, [Hall-Patton told the Review-Journal](#) in 2009. Other Lambs included a sheriff and county commissioner, Ralph and Darwin, respectively.

Joe W. Brown Drive: Five decades ago, an area called Las Vegas Park became known as the failed horse-racing track after legislation passed in order to merge industry with tourism, Green says. Joe W. Brown, who owned the Horseshoe [while Benny Binion went to prison](#), bought the complex and transferred the land to the city. The drive snakes around the property from Sahara to Desert Inn.

Stewart Avenue: Helen Stewart became known as "[the first lady of Las Vegas](#)" for her involvement in the development of Las Vegas. While raising multiple kids and running a ranch, Stewart became the first woman on the Clark County School District's Board of Trustees and at one point owned the most land in Lincoln County.

For more background on the namesakes of places and roads in Las Vegas, check out [Naming Las Vegas](#). Contact Kristen DeSilva at kdesilva@reviewjournal.com. Find her on Twitter: [@kristendesilva](#)

Posted August 21, 2015 - 1:39pm

Midcentury Las Vegas home converted to net-zero home



Former builder Craig Savage bought this 1963 home at auction, then converted it to a net-zero home — producing as much energy as it consumes — for the 2010 International Homebuilders Show. TONYA HARVEY/REAL ESTATE MILLIONS

By Felicia Mello
REAL ESTATE MILLIONS

Think green design is just for brand-new homes? Think again. Former builder Craig Savage bought [a 1963 Palmer & Krisel](#) at auction, then converted it to a net-zero home — producing as much energy as it consumes — for the 2010 International Homebuilders Show.

A seamless blend of midcentury-style and energy-saving technology, the three-bedroom, two-bath Paradise Palms home recently sold for \$320,000, \$20,000 above the asking price.

"It was literally a crack house," said Savage of his project. "We found a bullet in the door."

But the 2,000-square-foot house was also a classic example of the architectural style pioneered by the famous duo who designed thousands of affordable, modern homes in Southern California and Las Vegas in the 1950s and 1960s.

Their homes used open floor plans and large, strategically placed windows to maximize space and bring the outdoors in. Savage maintained those and other characteristic design elements, like a floating hearth that blends seamlessly into the avocado-colored living room wall that surrounds it.

"Our goal was to get to net zero, and do it in the least invasive way that we could — not turn it into an igloo or some other shape but absolutely to retain the midcentury look."

His team added solar panels to the roof and replaced all the plumbing, electrical and finishes — soliciting donations of green products from major manufacturers and documenting the process in an educational video for builders produced by his company, Building Media Inc.

A crushed granite countertop in the kitchen incorporates leftovers from other Dupont products, while the carpet in the TV room was made from recycled soda bottles.

A Thermo-Miser solar water heater takes care of hot water, with an on-demand gas system for backup. LED bulbs illuminate the rooms and can be controlled remotely from anywhere in the house.

Savage painted the exterior in calming, period-appropriate aqua and gray tones. A glass door in the front entryway gives a view of the backyard, bathing in light the long, wood-floored corridor that leads to the bedrooms. Sliding glass doors and clerestory windows provide the same effect in the living area.

A gate in the artificial-turf backyard opens straight onto the Las Vegas National Golf Course.

There's a small island in the swimming pool with a built-in umbrella, a whimsical holdover from the home's original design.

Other midcentury design elements took more work to preserve. The windows were replaced with newer fiberglass ones, but painted silver on the outside to mimic the original aluminum. In the master bedroom, south-facing clerestory windows provided light but let in heat that put demands on the house's cooling system.

"You just couldn't get to net-zero with those windows, even with triple-pane glass," said Jack LeVine, a Realtor and member of Las Vegas' historic preservation commission who consulted on the rehab.

The solution? Workers got rid of the windows, but installed panels that were painted turquoise on the outside so they stood out from the rest of the facade.

The master suite includes a walk-in closet and bathroom with low-flow showerhead and cultured marble surrounds. It overlooks the xeriscaped front yard, where weather gauges on the sprinkler system avoid watering when it's not necessary, and water-pervious pavers allow Las Vegas' infrequent rains to reach the ground.

Technology has changed rapidly in just the five years since the renovation. If he were to undertake a similar project today, Savage said, he might take advantage of solar's lower cost and improved efficiency, converting more of the home's systems to electric and using rooftop panels to power it all.

Nevertheless, the home's energy-saving features clearly drew interest from buyers. Savage received multiple offers in just a few days of putting the home on the market, he and LeVine said.

"Vegas is a great place to do this because you suffer from both heat and cold, so you get more bang for your zero-energy dollar," Savage said.

Posted date September 1, 2015 - 10:26pm

Researcher doubts Sinatra role in LV integration



Claytee White, director of oral history at UNLV, poses inside the special collections department at the university Thursday, Jan. 22, 2015. (Samantha Clemens-Kerbs/Las Vegas Review-Journal)

By Norm Clarke
Las Vegas Review-Journal

The director of the Oral History Research Center at UNLV is writing a book that will include a chapter titled: "**Frank Sinatra** Did Not Integrate Las Vegas: The Black Community's Attainment of Equal Public Accommodations."

Claytee White said her research doesn't support the widely reported view that Sinatra was the force behind the integration of Las Vegas.

"In all my research over many years, I cannot locate the substance behind this comment and a few others like it that are attributed to Sinatra," she said.

threatened to stop performing at Las Vegas hotels that banned black entertainers from entering through the front door.

Vera Goulet and her husband, singer **Robert Goulet**, spent many years in the company of **Sammy Davis Jr.**

"I think Frank probably did say it," Vera Goulet said. "Frank was very much for it."

Was he the one who made it all happen?

"I would hesitate to say yes," she said. "I would love to say it was Frank. I think he was instrumental in making it happen. But I think it was a combination of a number of people."

Peggy King, the widow of longtime Las Vegas performer **Sonny King**, said "Sonny told me that Frank told **Jack Entratter** (who ran the Sands) that he was leaving if the black entertainers had to come through the backdoors."

Corrine Sidney, who was twice married to Entratter, recalls seeing a Movietone news reel in a theater that showed black singing star **Lena Horne** "on Jack's arm going into the Sands. That was the first time a black was allowed to go through the front door of the Sands."

Sidney believes Sinatra was a key catalyst.

"Frank Sinatra did more for ending segregation than anyone I ever knew," she said. "He was the power in show business. That's how he felt. He was a fervent believer in equality. So was Jack."

She should know, she said. "I was the boss's girlfriend (and wife)."

"Frank not only talked the talk, he walked the walk," she said.

The scene and heard

Co-host **Carlos Diaz** is at out after nine months on the morning show at CBS affiliate KXNT-radio, 840 AM and 100.5 FM. The former host of the syndicated news magazine "Extra" was let go Friday. Back in November, when he started, he told me, "This is not a stop. This is something I want to do for the next 10 years." Sources said the 6-9 a.m. show with Diaz, **Dayna Roselli** and **Nate Tannenbaum**, had trouble getting traction in ratings. Diaz had worked for ESPN and Headline News (HLN) and was a Peabody Award-winning anchor in Indianapolis. ...

Longtime political consultant **Sig Rogich**, initially a partner in the new downtown restaurant Therapy, says he has given his interest in the venture to his wife, **Lori**, and daughter **Britten**. The 150-seat restaurant and bar is in the former Dollar Store space at 520 E. Fremont St. Rogich was a former part owner of Walden Pond on West Sahara Avenue, across from Palace Station, and the Bar of America in Truckee, Calif. ...

Peter Sellers movie buffs will get a chuckle out of the replica of the fountain statue Manneken Pis, which was unveiled Tuesday by The D hotel-casino's **Derek Stevens**. A replica of statue, which depicts a small boy urinating, had a role in Sellers' film "The Party," which co-starred **Claudine Longet**. The statue in the film was set up to have different levels of flow. Sellers' character hit the wrong button and soaked a house guest. The original statue was completed in the early 1600s in Brussels.

On this day

Sept. 2, 1989: Basketball star **Michael Jordan** marries **Juanita Vanoy**, who had threatened him with a paternity lawsuit over their 10-month-old son, at 3:30 a.m. at the Little White Chapel. After years of rumors about marital problems and infidelity, they divorced in 2006. (Thanks to **Mike Precker** for this item.)

The punch line

"A 108-year-old message in a bottle washed up on a beach in Europe. Actually, it wasn't a message, it was **Larry King's** to-do list." — **Conan O'Brien**

Norm Clarke's column appears Sunday, Monday, Wednesday and Friday. He can be reached at 702-383-0244 or norm@reviewjournal.com. Find more online at www.normclarke.com. On Twitter: [@Norm_Clarke](https://twitter.com/Norm_Clarke)

The Long, Hot Summer of '55

How a season of hubris and disappointment helped reinvent Vegas



The New Frontier, circa 1955.

The black and white marble lobby floor, the 75-foot mural behind the lobby bar, the pink and purple flying saucers—the New Frontier really was *new*. The Las Vegas resort had swept aside the cowboy dust (and pretty much everything else) of its predecessor, the Last Frontier, and presented its opening-night guests with stratospheric glamour befitting the mid-1950s. But the crowds on April 4, 1955, were really there for the show: Mario Lanza, live in the Venus Room. Lanza—charismatic, tumultuous and brilliant—was coming out of semi-retirement for the gig. The word was that the one-time heartthrob who had battled with his weight—and movie producers—had spent the previous three months in Palm Springs getting into shape for Las Vegas. Like the New Frontier itself, this was a comeback that had to be seen. ¶ An assortment of celebrities and fans, including Lanza’s mother and father, enjoyed

Then a hush settled across the room. The moment had arrived: The famous tenor and movie star Mario Lanza, backed by Garwood Van's house orchestra, would sing at last. The crowd held its breath, ready for the first strains of "Be My Love."

For too long, there was silence. Then Jimmy Durante walked onstage to make an announcement: "Mario is too ill to perform."

The audience was bitterly disappointed—one Lanza superfan who had flown in from Pittsburgh burst into tears—but the show went on. Actor Ray Bulger—Scarecrow from *The Wizard of Oz*—and singer Mindy Carson improvised a show that satisfied most of those in attendance, but it didn't stem anger at Lanza, who refused to even walk onstage or attend a post-show press conference.

Lanza's no-show aside, opening night at the New Frontier was regarded as a success. One of the Strip's first resorts had reinvented itself for the Atomic Age, bigger and better. It whet the appetite for what was to come.

The spring and summer of 1955 promised to be the wildest stretch in the brief history of the Las Vegas Strip. The New Frontier, the Royal Nevada, the Dunes, the Moulin Rouge, the Riviera and the Stardust were all planning to open, nearly doubling the number of hotels on what had until recently been known simply as Highway 91. On the surface, it seemed a reasonable bet: Clark County's population had ballooned from 16,414 in 1940 to more than 50,000 in 1955. The postwar boom, fueled by what one might call the military-industrial-vacation complex, showed no sign of abating, and for would-be resort developers, the old Highway 91 looked a lot like the promised land.

The 1940s had seen the pioneering arrivals of El Rancho Vegas, the Last Frontier, the Flamingo and the Thunderbird. In the early 1950s, the Desert Inn, Sands and Sahara joined them on the Strip. The resorts had prospered—likely because of the contacts and marketing acumen that operators such as Moe Dalitz and Carl Cohen brought with them—but, on the surface, it looked like opening a successful Las Vegas casino was as easy as tripping and hitting the ground.

By the early 1950s, the Tax Commission—then the casino industry's governing body—was flooded with proposals for new hotels. In August 1953, the commission deferred acting on four gambling licenses, representing more than \$15 million in new investment, pending more information about the projects' finances—a sensible move. The original names of all four potential properties will be unfamiliar even to Las Vegas history aficionados, although three of the places ultimately opened their doors.

The Casablanca, planned for the Strip and Race Track Road, would be owned by brothers David and Lou Gensburg (who held the land) and a combination of Los Angeles and Miami businessmen, including Harpo and Gummo of the Marx Brothers. The Araby, slated for land across the highway from the Flamingo, was fronted by Rhode Island restaurateur Joseph Sullivan; Al Gottesman, a Floridian who formerly owned a chain of theaters; and Bob Rice, a Beverly Hills costume jewelry dealer. And the Sunrise, slated for north of the Last Frontier, was headed by Los Angeles hotelier Frank Fishman.

Nearby, on the other side of the Strip, a consortium of investors led by developer William J. O'Connor planned to enlarge the existing Desert Spa motel—which was chiefly used to accommodate performers at the Last Frontier—into a full-fledged hotel and casino at a cost of \$3.5 million. In February 1954, prolific film actor Pat O'Brien was attached to the project; in return for his regular hosting duties and appearances at the casino, it would be named

“Pat O’Brien’s Desert Spa.”

Showing just how speculative the Strip development game has always been, none of these hotels opened under their original names. The Casablanca morphed into the Riviera, and Race Track Road became Riviera Boulevard. The Araby kept its Middle Eastern theme but opened as the Dunes. The Sunrise became the Royal Nevada, and did open, but not with its original owner. And the Desert Spa became an obscure piece of Vegas trivia.

Adding four casinos to a seven-property market in the span of a few months might have seemed like a recipe for disaster, but potential builders, emboldened by the growing tourist trade, clambered aboard. Former gambling boat owner Tony Cornero announced in April 1954 plans for a place called the Stardust, but financing difficulties meant he wouldn’t be anywhere near finished by its scheduled 1955 opening date. (Indeed, he died shooting craps at the Desert Inn while his project was still in hiatus.)

Soon after Cornero announced his plans, the owners of the Last Frontier revealed that they were meeting the new competition head-on. In June 1954, they began work on the New Frontier, a casino, dinner theater and lounge expansion that would replace the Last Frontier’s existing focal point. Built in 1942, the Last Frontier’s main building was ill-adapted to the larger scale of the 1950s Strip. It had severe design limitations—guests had to go outside to get from the casino to the showroom—so, in the spirit of the times, the Little Church of the West wedding chapel was moved out of the way and new construction begun.

The New Frontier would develop into more than an addition; the Last Frontier name would be retired and the entire resort given a Space Age theme after a \$2 million renovation and expansion; and the Silver Slipper, which had been an adjunct gambling hall in the Last Frontier Village, would ultimately become a standalone property.

By the summer of 1954, there was a building frenzy on the Strip—and beyond. The Showboat on Boulder Highway was racing toward completion. Downtown, ground was broken for the \$5 million, 10-story-tall Fremont. And on Bonanza Road, near the primarily black Westside neighborhood, the Moulin Rouge was announced. This project, owned chiefly by Louis Rubin and Alexander Bisno of Los Angeles, pledged a “cosmopolitan” admission policy—a coded announcement that, in contrast with the segregated resorts and gambling halls of the Strip and Downtown, the Moulin Rouge would be racially integrated.



Camp Desert Rock soldiers prepare to get a sneak peek of the new Royal Nevada on April 18, 1955. | New Frontier courtesy UNLV Special Collections; Royal Nevada courtesy Las Vegas News Bureau

As 1955 began and work continued on the Stardust, Royal Nevada, Moulin Rouge, Dunes, Riviera, Desert Spa and New Frontier, it became clear that there would be many choices facing Las Vegas visitors that summer—perhaps too many.

No one was deluded enough to think that just opening the doors would guarantee success. So hotel owners turned their focus to the one area where they could make a distinctive impression: entertainment. The Royal Nevada hired 33-year show business veteran Eddie Rio as entertainment director. Rio pledged to bring “legitimate theater” that would rival Broadway to the Royal Nevada’s technically outstanding stage. Rio brought in television and radio veteran Jerry Fielding to conduct the house orchestra and hired away the Sands’ George Tapps as chief show producer and choreographer.

Rio opted for sophistication when positioning his theater, bringing out former Metropolitan Opera star Helen Traubel as the centerpiece of the opening show. Traubel had also previously played nightclubs, including New York’s Copacabana, and, thanks to television exposure, was well known to audiences. Comedian Dave Barry and ballerina Phyllis Ponn rounded out the revue, which was supported by Jerry Fielding’s orchestra and the Coronet Dancers.

Big names all, but there was one little problem: Even after Traubel was announced as the opening attraction, it wasn’t clear that the casino would even open. In February, the Tax Commission decreed that majority partners Frank Fishman, Sam “Game Boy” Miller and Herbert “Pittsy” Manheim were “totally undesirable citizens for Nevada,” and that it would not approve the casino’s application for a gaming license until those three were removed from the organization entirely. Miller and Manheim were, the commission found, well-known illegal gambling operators in Michigan and Florida. Having received its fair share of heat from the anti-gaming Kefauver Committee for allowing gamblers from elsewhere to set up shop in Nevada, the Tax Commission refused to continue granting licenses to those with demonstrated illegal gambling backgrounds.

The Royal Nevada ultimately reorganized and was granted a license in time for an April opening. Meanwhile, other hotels forged ahead. The Riviera planned to win what was becoming a less-than-friendly competition, not through class or mass but by star power: The hotel lured Liberace to be its opening headliner for an unheard-of \$50,000-a-week performance fee. The New Frontier matched the Riviera’s ante, paying Lanza \$100,000 for a two-week opening engagement.

The Dunes, by contrast, was gunning for sheer volume. Its stage was to be wider than any in town, with enough room for 40 chorus girls, and its dinner theater was the first in Vegas to add balcony seating.

The Moulin Rouge had its own star attraction, unique in Las Vegas and more subversive socially than Liberace: the lack of a color line. Early in 1955, a campaign to bring former first lady Eleanor Roosevelt to the opening began—clearly, this was not business as usual.

One member of the class of 1955 stumbled as it approached the starting line. Despite publicly announcing a January opening, the Desert Spa failed to get the green light from the Tax Commission, which had deferred definitive action on a casino license for months, citing the unsuitability of various investors and principals. Finally, in March, it granted the Spa a conditional license, but, come the hotel’s scheduled April opening, it was unable to meet those conditions. The Desert Spa never opened its casino, struggling as a hotel and nightclub before collapsing into a bankruptcy from which it never emerged—a visible sign of the increasing commitment of Nevada gaming regulators to maintaining the state’s integrity.

After the New Frontier’s lanza-less opening on April 4, the Royal Nevada was next in line. On April 18, the property held a special sneak preview for the “atomic soldiers” of Camp Desert Rock, who had just completed the Operation Teapot nuclear test. The next night, the Royal opened to civilians.

The resort's owners were determined to dazzle. In addition to the sophisticated entertainment—which would include Rio's promised Broadway shows—the Royal Nevada showcased the Dancing Waters, an attraction that had been developed by Hans Hasslach and Harold Steinman, who staged its first demonstration at the West German Industrial Exhibition in West Berlin. The Waters made their American debut in early 1953 at Radio City Music Hall, and now the international sensation had come to the Nevada desert.

A 48-foot mechanism held 4,000 jets, which forced 38 tons of water as high as 50 feet in the air, as the water (lit in various colors) moved in rhythm with the music. Co-creator Hasslach himself came out to work the console at the Royal Nevada.

The Riviera opened the very next day, April 20. Liberace sparkled in the showroom, and the hotel's nine stories stood out on the mostly two-story Strip. The “New High in the Las Vegas Sky” had been anticipated since groundbreaking; locals took pride in having the state's tallest building in their backyard, although there didn't seem much else to set the new casino apart from its competitors.



Dancers from the *Tropi Can-Can* revue help christen the *Moulin Rouge* on May 24, 1955. | Photo courtesy of UNLV Special Collections

The Dunes debuted next, on May 23. Its opening show didn't quite match the New Frontier's or Riviera's star power; Al Gottesman, in charge of entertainment, opted for a revue entitled *New York—Paris—Paradise* starring, in the show's first stint, dancer Vera-Ellen. With only 194 rooms, the Dunes was smaller than the other properties on the Strip, and its chief owners had no experience with gambling, although they had hired a staff with extensive hotel and restaurant experience.

The Dunes boasted that it had the country's largest swimming pool, and the 30-foot fiberglass sultan that welcomed new arrivals gave

the resort an identity. But that was not enough; the casino struggled immediately, and the public firing of headliner Wally Cox after a disappointing July debut brought the hotel the wrong kind of attention.

The Moulin Rouge, by contrast, opened the following day to good publicity. Eleanor Roosevelt was not, in the end, available to cut the ribbon, so that duty fell to Las Vegas Mayor C.D. Baker. The May 24 opening featured the *Tropi Can-Can* revue, whose dancers were featured on the cover of *Life* magazine. Former heavyweight boxing champion Joe Louis, who owned a small share of the resort, was on hand to greet gamblers.

Entertainment was an attraction at the Moulin Rouge (its lounge featured groups led by jazz all-stars Wild Bill Davis and Ahmad Jamal), but it was the resort's racially inclusive policies that set it apart. “The owners,” Alan Jarlson declared in the *Las Vegas Sun*, “are deserving of orchids for the magnificent job they accomplished in introducing a new and pleasant atmosphere to the resort world.”

This was the story that Las Vegas wanted told: progress, social and economic, in the atomic boomtown. Almost immediately, however, it was clear that progress on the latter front would

not be as easy as hoped.

The Moulin Rouge has become part of the Las Vegas legend. As a social institution, it was a success; with Strip musicians, including Frank Sinatra, attending the Westside casino's after-hours jam sessions, it became one of the city's hottest places. But that did not translate into profits.

From the start, the casino lost money. Whether it was inexperience in running a hotel-casino or just bad circumstances, Bisno and Rubin found themselves unable to meet their mortgage payments. In November, they closed the doors.

Other properties were struggling as well. The Dunes' owners, eager to cut their losses, leased their new casino to the operators of the Sands, led by Jake Freeman. An attorney for Gottesman, Sullivan, Rice and the other major Dunes investors cited a "persistent losing streak" at the casino as the reason for its financial difficulties, but in fact players were too scarce—having less than 200 rooms severely handicapped the resort—to provide much income for the casino, even if the house had been unlucky.

The Sands hoped to turn around the Dunes' fortunes by replicating its own success, based in no small part on quality entertainment. Sinatra, riding on a camel, kicked off the "new" Dunes' three-day Arabian Nights-themed opening celebration in early September. Sands entertainment director Jack Entratter took over booking duties for the Dunes as well, but aside from opening night with Sinatra, he kept the big guns for the Sands; in November, for instance, Billy Gray and Georgia Gibbs headlined the Dunes, while Nat King Cole was the top attraction at the Sands.

Under Sands management, the Dunes wasn't much improved; the following year, Sands executives declined to renew their lease, and for a time the \$5 million resort operated without its casino. It was not until Chicago transportation magnate Jake Gottlieb bought the property and hired fellow Chicago trucking kingpin Major Riddle that the casino found its footing. Riddle added rooms and, in early 1957, brought to the resort *Minsky's Follies*, the first show to feature bare-breasted showgirls.

By late August, it was obvious that a problem extended beyond the Dunes and Moulin Rouge. A number of casinos old and new had fired key executives and public relations people, but that did not turn the tide. "Is it just possible," *Magazine Las Vegas* gossip columnist Carmen Tempereau wondered, "that we have reached the ultimate in resort hotel [growth]?"

Tempereau noted that "money [was] not as plentiful" as it had been a few years earlier, adding that there were fewer hotels back then. The only solution, she thought, was for all hotels to begin "sincerely" promoting Las Vegas as a city for conventions with 5,000 to 15,000 delegates.

Meanwhile, as the losses mounted, owners became increasingly frantic. In September, eight new investors pumped a half-million dollars into the New Frontier. The Space Age casino turned to technology as well, installing in the Cloud 9 Lounge what it claimed to be the "world's largest television screen"—a 9-by-12-foot projection set that was used to broadcast Wednesday night boxing matches. "Bigger than life-size and better than ringside," regularly scheduled events also included Saturday morning broadcasts of East Coast baseball games.

Around this time the Royal Nevada was taken over by a group led by former Sands executive Bill Miller. Miller's group was no more successful than the original owners, and the end came on New Year's Day, 1956. Sheriff's deputies arrived to serve a writ filed by the Culinary union for \$3,900 in unpaid wages, setting off a panic among employees, who feared the hotel was

being closed. A mass hysteria swept through the casino, as dealers snatched cash and chips from their tables and bartenders swiped bills from their registers. Royal Nevada management, hoping to save something, closed the resort that night.



The Dunes welcomes guests in this undated photo from the 1950s. | Photos courtesy of UNLV Special Collections

A month later, Jake Kozloff of the New Frontier announced a lease on the property, but it never operated profitably (as the Sands had attempted with the Dunes, Kozloff tried to run the Royal Nevada as a junior partner to the New Frontier, which was itself having problems). The Royal was ultimately absorbed by the Stardust, and its casino became the Stardust Auditorium.

These economic disasters up and down the Strip were not slowing the pace of construction. In addition to several motels such as El Morocco and La Martinique, the Tropicana, Stardust and Hacienda had all started building or made strides toward groundbreaking in the summer of 1955. If the Strip couldn't survive with 10 resorts, how could it handle 13?

What's more, the storm clouds over the Strip were becoming a national story, with *The Wall Street Journal* running a particularly scathing piece. Then came the cover of the June 20, 1955, issue of *Life*—the very one with the photo of the Moulin Rouge revue—that bore the foreboding headline: “Las Vegas—Is Boom Overextended?”

Something had to give.

The first local response to national reports of Las Vegas' decline was denial. Indeed, conditions were not as bad as some reported. Statewide, gaming revenue rose from \$94.4 million in fiscal 1955 to \$113.1 million the following year—a 20 percent increase. Much of that growth was in Las Vegas.

Still, change was quick in coming. On July 1, the Resort Hotels Association announced that seven of its members would be instituting a \$2 minimum cover charge in its dinner theaters—too many guests were enjoying the music without buying anything or gambling once the show was over.

Even before the various financial woes, though, sentiment had been building that the city was missing something: occupied hotel rooms between Sunday and Thursday. The only solution seemed to be conventions. As early as 1949, a convention hall was proposed, but nothing ever came of it.

In 1953, the Chamber of Commerce established a convention bureau, but it was limited in its effectiveness. The city simply did not have the facilities to host major groups, and resort owners flatly refused to book any conventions over the weekend; those rooms were needed for gamblers.

“WHY DRAG OUR FEET?” asked an April 1954 *Las Vegas Sun* editorial headline, in reference to building a convention hall. “The need is so basic,” the author wrote, “that it should occur to every 10-year-old child.”

To this point, owners of the resort hotels, content with the profits from their casinos, were happy to let someone else bear the burden of building a hall that could accommodate thousands of delegates. That attitude would no longer do; with as many as six new resort hotels opening, there would be a crunch of competition that could doom the town. “The problem of an off-season business slack” is already here, the *Sun* warned.

Clark County Commissioner George Albright led the charge for a convention hall, a thankless task in 1954. Even before the Dunes opened, Albright and John De Luca, chairman of the chamber’s convention hall committee, were looking with envy at the newly opened Coliseum in Spokane, Washington, declaring that their city deserved a similar convention hall, only larger.

The disappointing summer of 1955—and the promise of even more new resorts to come—put wind in Albright’s sails. After a visit to Las Vegas by Benjamin Moore, the designer of the Spokane convention hall, the chamber approved plans for a convention center that could, at maximum, seat 8,500 delegates. The chamber even found the perfect location: Joe W. Brown’s bankrupt racetrack on Paradise Road.

Meanwhile, Albright kept pushing. He received authorization from the Legislature to assemble a board to run a convention center and tried to find ways to pay for the center that would be acceptable to voters and the resort industry.

Financing the convention center was Albright’s major headache. Voters refused, on principle, to pay a dime to fund a project that would benefit the hotels; the hotels were willing to chip in, but not pay the entire bill; and motel owners, complaining that they would host few conventioners, had no desire to ante up.

Albright was able to engineer a compromise: The hotels, led by Desert Inn owner Moe Dalitz, would pay a tax of 5 percent of gross room revenues to repay bonds taken out to build the center; motels would contribute 3 percent. The voters, satisfied that they wouldn’t be saddled with the bill, approved a bond measure in March 1956. With additional assessments based on the number of games in operation, Albright successfully got the money he needed for the center.

Construction started the following year and, in 1959, the dome-shaped Convention Center opened with a seemingly limitless 90,000 square feet of exhibit space. Albright, who had by this time resigned his seat on the commission, was named the center’s executive director.

So how did the class of '55 fare?

The Desert Spa never opened as a casino; by 1960 it had been converted into a shopping center.

The New Frontier soared into the Space Age despite money problems; in 1967, after several ownership changes, it was remodeled as the Western-themed (again) Frontier, then was bought by Howard Hughes. It closed in 2007 and was imploded for the never-built Plaza Las Vegas. Today, the land is slated for Alon Las Vegas.

The Royal Nevada failed and was swallowed by the Stardust; its rooms remained open until that property's 2006 closure.

The Riviera struggled but righted itself under Gus Greenbaum and remained a Strip contender until its closure in May.

The Dunes also struggled, but managed to remain open until 1992, when Steve Wynn bought, closed and demolished it to make way for Bellagio.

The Moulin Rouge, padlocked after its November 1955 closure, reopened as a hotel in 1956 but operated only sporadically for years. Eventually it was run as an extended-stay motel, until a series of fires in the 2000s made it uninhabitable.

The Stardust did open—at last—in 1958, and gave Las Vegas some of its most notorious stories (Nicholas Pileggi's Casino, among others) before being bought by Boyd Gaming in 1985. Boyd closed it in 2006 to make way for the never-built Echelon. The land is now slated for the under-construction Resorts World.

Of the seven resorts that were scheduled to open in 1955, none ended the year with their original ownership and management; two did not open (although the Stardust ultimately did); two closed (almost) before the year was out; and the remaining three—Riviera, Dunes and the New Frontier—became viable casinos but only after significant changes.

The catastrophes of 1955 muddy the story of the 1950s boom, but they actually helped put the city on its path to growth. City leaders learned that casino failures not only were possible, but were almost routine. And the prospect of a greater collapse of the local hospitality economy prodded property owners and voters to finally take action on a convention center.

That convention center—and the convention bureau created to fill it—would evolve into the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority, which has successfully marketed Las Vegas to the world for more than half a century. That Las Vegas survived both national gambling expansion and the recent recession relatively intact is a testament to two things: the LVCVA's work in promoting the city as a destination and individual operators keeping the city's attractions current.

That another expansion of the convention center will soon occupy the site of the Riviera may be fitting: Were it not for the scare that the Riviera and its rivals threw into town in the summer of 1955, there may not have been a convention center at all. In which case Las Vegas would be a very different place today.